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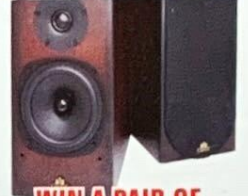
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AVID *EXCLUSIVE!* **VOLVERE** **SP** turntable



COMPETITION



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7 PAGES OF LETTERS - THE BEST WINS A PAIR OF KEF Q100 LOUDSPEAKERS! (UK ONLY)



Disc Duo

Avid has completed upgrades on its best selling Volvere SP and Sequel SP turntables. Paul Rigby wonders if the changes are worth the subsequent increase in price.

Both the Avid Volvere SP and Sequel SP turntables have a deserved high reputation in audiophile vinyl circles for high quality and value for money.

Both turntables have recently undergone improvements within their core design that promise advances in sound quality. There is a price to pay, however, as both turntables now cost £500 each extra.

I asked the Avid boss, Conrad Mas, what improvements have been made to the designs. "The Volvere's power supply has been separated from the chassis for the first time,

which means that we have been able to remove the cooling fins as well as fill in the cut-outs that were featured as part of the older design. This has made the chassis stronger. That strength has now been reinforced by 700% because the chassis is also thicker: moving from 18mm MDF to 22mm MDF. The old chassis will break under 40kg of load but the new version will take over 320kg."

Mas declared that he wanted to move the power supply to an external chassis in order to incorporate a larger transformer. There was no capacity to have it installed onto the original chassis,

"This means that the power supply is kept away from the turntable within a screened case so that, on this basis alone, the turntable will improve its performance. The larger transformer helps too. It gives the turntable more oomph."

Moving to a larger toroidal transformer promised to reduce noise, making its operation more stable with a greater headroom of power to improve speed consistency. But what of the customer base? Volvere customers tended to buy the turntable because the power supply was attached to the chassis. Is Mas shooting himself in the foot?



"with Avid, we are a bit like Porsche. That is, our turntables and designs have got the basic essence right"

"There is a large amount of people who perceive that having a separate power supply is better. In the old Volvere, it didn't really make much difference because we had the transformer encased underneath the drive motor. Now we have moved to a bigger transformer and have made modifications to the power supply, the chassis is not compatible, hence the separate supply."

There have been improvements to the costlier Sequel, but fewer of them and less significant than those in the Volvere. The previous Sequel chassis was basically a Volvere design but without the built-in power supply.

Now, the Volvere and Sequel have exactly the same chassis created to the same new specifications and thickness.

There is an option for current users of the Volvere who wish to upgrade to the Sequel standard. Mas explained the practicalities of the process, "It's easy because all you need to do is undo three screws underneath the turntable whereupon the motor housing comes off. You then put the Sequel motor housing on there and attach the Sequel power supply. The upgrade price is £1700."

The new improvements to the



Volvere and Sequel turntables are not what you would term revolutionary. Mainly because the entire turntable range features top-down technology from the Reference design in the range, the Acutus. A philosophy that Mas confirms: "the best way of describing our products is that they are evolutionary. You look at some cars, say, and you can draw a convenient metaphor. Some turntable manufacturers act like Ford. When they bring out a new Ford Focus it looks nothing like the old model. The only similarity is that both share four wheels.

Some turntable manufacturers act in the same way. They even act like that within a current range, as if they are constantly re-inventing the wheel. With Avid, we are a bit like Porsche. That is, our turntables and designs have got the basic essence right because we take the basic design from the top-of-the-range Acutus. With the new Volvere and Sequel variants, all we are doing is slowly tweaking and improving. With a Porsche, you may see five incarnations of a broadly similar product. With the Porsche 911, for example, it's a standing joke that they have not changed anything in the last fourteen years.

"You can actually see subtle differences that we are making to our products, all of the time, but each change makes a significant improvement. And yet all of our turntables have family ties. All of our turntables have the three-point suspension, the same bearings and the same clamping system. Yes, there are subtle changes but in effect it's the same thing, it's not a completely different design."

For this review, as the Volvere has experienced the greater improvements of the two turntables under discussion, I decided to give it a more thorough review, bringing in an older model Volvere to perform a straight A-B comparison with the newly upgraded version. After this, I decided to compare the new Volvere with the recently upgraded Sequel – the Sequel being the next logical upgrade step for any Volvere owner.

At first glance, the Volvere/Sequel comparison is a complete waste of time. After all, the Sequel is more expensive and it offers a higher specification, so it should be a better bet, shouldn't it? Well, ordinarily, yes, but think about it for a minute because this aural comparison is not as redundant as you might think. Often ignored by hi-fi magazine review teams, major upgrades to a well established line of products can sometimes provide an unbalancing



effect. The reason for the comparison is to see if the brand balance has been retained and if the Sequel still provides a valid upgrade. If Avid have got this wrong, the upgraded Volvere will have closed the gap on the Sequel to such an extent that the new Sequel will be largely redundant. If that is the case, then the extra £1,500 to purchase a new Sequel SP will be a waste of money and you might just find that the Volvere SP becomes a bargain.

But, one thing at a time. Let's check out the old and new Volvere SPs first.

SOUND QUALITY

Initially spinning the Count Basie LP, the original HMV pressing of 'Count Basie And The Kansas City 7', right from the off, the new Volvere impressed over and above the older, original model. Firstly, the introductory drum-based rim shots sounded rounder and fuller. Relatively minor beats in the grand scheme of

more involved personality.

Greater complexity within Basie's piano performance produced a more focused delivery and an inherent, multi-timbral complexity that was new to the upgraded Volvere. Also high on the improvement list was bass which now exhibited a greater presence. Fuller and richer, bass took a more dominant role in driving the music forward.

Distortion has also been reduced which improved the rich nature of the soundstage as clarity increased, providing a quieter background in which the brass could better express itself. The sax, especially, benefitted here. It's reed-like tones now had an expressive texture. The new suite of extended frequency highs and lows were best expressed in the treble-heavy cymbal effect which positively shone, keeping the track light, almost ethereal at times.

Moving to a more aggressive beat and The Pixies' track, 'Debaser' from their 'Doolittle' LP, recently

GETTING TO KNOW...

The Volvere SP £4,000

Utilising a twin belt system, this sprung sub-chassis design features a one-piece, integrated clamping system on a threaded spindle. Running at 33 1/3 and 45 rpm, the speeds are changed on the chassis itself while the standard SME armboard can be changed for other mountings to order.

The Sequel SP £5,500

Also featuring a twin belt system on a sub-chassis along with the same clamping system and arm options, the Sequel differs from the Volvere by having its 33 1/3 and 45 rpm speed options triggered on the front fascia of the external power supply.

The Acutus SP £10,000

Featuring the same belt, arm, speeds and speed select options as the Sequel, the Acutus features a twin-dial clamping system to clamp to the spindle and then the record afterwards along with a more complex sprung chassis build.

... also in the range Diva II £1,600, Diva SP £2,600, Acutus Reference SP £15,000

the track, the rim shots now took a more important role, with a new and surprising physicality that was not there on the older model. This feature married well with the subtle acoustic guitar which now had a

reissued via Mobile Fidelity, the dynamic qualities of this rocking classic hit me straight between the eyes as the improved Volvere's bass added both focus and punch to the lower frequencies, giving the ear

A SEQUEL TO THE SEQUEL

The worry for the upgraded Sequel was that the Volvere would move in on its territory, becoming sonically so close that the reason for buying a Sequel at all would be negated. I set up the Volvere and the Sequel with the same arm and cartridge that I utilise on my Avid Acutus: the SME IV and Benz Glider, to provide consistency during the comparison.

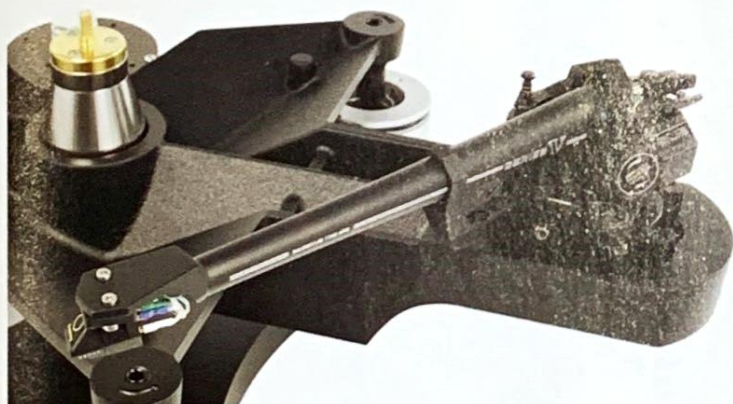
Playing The Pixies' track first proved to be quite shocking. Yes, the Volvere produced a very attractive and welcoming sound but plugging in the Sequel transported the ear into a whole new sonic world. The improved chassis unleashed the Sequel, lifting the already impressive sound to new heights. Unlike the steadily improved sonics of the Volvere, the Sequel actually picked up the basic foundations of the sound and completely rearranged them. This was no improvement, this was a complete reinterpretation as the soundstage moved from 2D to 3D and onion layers of detail heaved into view, adding depth while, like the famous bra commercial of yore, the deck 'lifted and separated' the

Lead vocals were raised and pushed forward while instruments became entities of their own. Bass guitar now sounded like someone was pulling and rolling their thumb from one string to another – full of personality and character, in other words. Electric guitar soared, surrounded by copious air and a newly discovered but effective subtle reverb. The general impression of the deck was one of tremendous smoothness. A bit like the 'Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy's, totally black, frictionless spaceship that sat in the car park of the 'Restaurant At The End Of The Universe', the Sequel eased its way through music without any effort at all.

Playing the jazz-infused Basie LP, the Sequel showed just what a top all rounder it is. Double bass was now a major part of the arrangement instead of an afterthought while the sax sounded so slinky and sexy that it really should be submitted to the British Board Of Censors before your ears get anywhere near it. Trumpets displayed a purity of tone that rolled with the melody while the treble-soaked cymbals presented themselves as heavenly conglomerations.

So, does the Avid Sequel SP sound like a £5,500 turntable? Most definitely. In fact, Avid boss, Conrad Mas, was honest enough to share his view that the Sequel SP is actually the best value for money turntable in the range. As an Acutus owner myself, after hearing the Sequel SP, I have to agree. Further, however, I'm a little worried at just how close the sound of the Sequel is to the Acutus. Yes, the Acutus is richer in tone, deeper and fuller with a symphonic presentation but the Sequel SP encroaches upon the Acutus territory, muscling in on many of its standout points.

That's what the Sequel does so well, it opens your brain to treasures of newly discovered detail, reintroducing you to your record collection.



a greater impact. This adds to the entertainment value of the upgraded turntable because Rock provided a more guttural slam, enhancing the shock value of drums.

Similarly, bass guitar was now more meaty, taking a more significant role in how the track was driven. The bass guitar gave the track more direction too, acting as a rudder. But lower frequencies are not the only improvements here. The tambourine rose from the mire on the left channel. Before, this percussion instrument melded into the background but, with the upgraded Volvere, this treble-heavy sonic ingredient played a significant role, simultaneously adding musicality but, because it sat at the extreme of the channel, it stretched the soundstage, creating a larger entertainment vista.

Finally, acting as a significant cherry on the top of this

fulfilling cake, lead singer, Black Francis, produced a sound that was fuller and more confident, generating more power in his delivery and creating a better understanding in the mind of the listener as to just how much emotion Francis was putting into his performance.

CONCLUSION

There are upgrades and there are upgrades, but the new Volvere SP provides a significant overhaul of the entire sound spectrum. The improvements are not minor, nor are they selective so it is frankly amazing that Avid refuses to add a blaring addendum to the Volvere SP brand such as the 'Volvere SP Pro' or even the 'Volvere SP GTI'. But then Avid has always had an understated view on life.

There are no shouty marketing men on tap here. This is a company that enjoys giving you a gentle nudge and then letting the hardware do the talking. The Volvere SP does more than that, it sings.

REFERENCE SYSTEM

- Icon PS3 phono amp
- Aesthetix Calypso Preamp
- Icon MB845 Monoblocks
- Quad ESL-57 Speakers (One Thing Modified)
- Black Rhodium Ninja speaker cables

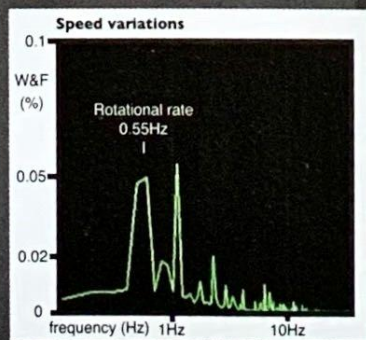
MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Avid Volvere ran at exactly the right speed. Unweighted wow and flutter measured 0.15% DIN peak and 0.08% with weighting applied. Our spectral analysis clearly shows 0.06% cyclic wow at the basic rotational rate of 0.55Hz, which is low. There is an equal amount of second harmonic but very little in the way of flutter components above that frequency. The Volvere is a well engineered, giving good results for belt drive. NK

speed error	0
wow	0.08
flutter	0.05

total (unwtd)	0.15
total (wtd)	0.08

WOW & FLUTTER



VERDICT

It may cost £500 more now but the money has been efficiently invested into a design that turns an excellent design into one that is a finger tip away from brilliant.

AVID VOLVERE SP £4,000
AVID
 +44(0)1480 869 900
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- FOR**
- inherent design
 - detail extraction
 - low frequency grip
 - clarity

AGAINST
 -nothing